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MARXISM, GENDER, AND MEDIATED MEMORIES OF NATIONAL SOCIALISM:
THE PARADOXICAL CASE OF CHRISTA WOLF'S *KINDHEITSMUSTER* (1976)

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ABSTRACT

This article explores ambivalences in the representation of women's participation in the Third Reich in Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1976). Its thematic and aesthetic departure from the GDR's official stance towards National Socialism is well-noted. As this article demonstrates, however, Wolf's subversive feminine and moral perspective on the Nazi past also relies on an ideal of human interaction, embodied in some of the female protagonists. This leads Wolf to reinstate the idealised gender norms that traditionally define the memory of National Socialism. Her association of women with essential values further clashes with institutional Marxism's emphasis on the historical, and therefore changeable, nature of man, his social relations, and of gendered oppression. This article considers Wolf's paradoxical departure from and reinscription of the state-sanctioned model of history in light of the Marxist texts that have shaped Wolf's interpretation of fascism, paying particular attention to the place of the Frankfurt School's concept of instrumental reason and J.J. Bachofen's notion of matriarchy in her feminist and historical understanding. An examination of the ambivalent construction of gender and guilt in *Kindheitsmuster* raises important questions about how gender functions symbolically in the left-wing texts that came to shape post-war interpretations of National Socialism in both Germanies.

Anhand des Romans *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) untersucht dieser Aufsatz Ambivalenzen in Christa Wolfs Darstellung der Schuld bzw. Komplizenschaft von Frauen im Dritten Reich. Die thematische und ästhetische Abweichung des Romans von der offiziellen Leitlinie der DDR zur NS-Vergangenheit wird von Kritikern oft hervorgehoben. Weniger beachtet wird die Tatsache, dass Wolfs subversiver weiblicher und moralischer Blick auf das Dritte Reich auf einer durch ihre weiblichen Figuren verkörperten Idealvorstellung des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenlebens aufbaut. Dies führt in *Kindheitsmuster* dazu, dass Wolf genau diejenigen stereotypischen Ideale weiblicher Unschuld wiederholt, die im kulturellen Gedächtnis verankert sind. Wolfs Aufladung von Weiblichkeit mit positiven Werten steht zudem in Widerspruch zur marxistischen Deutung von Geschlechterrollen und -hierarchien als gesellschaftsbedingt. Dieser Artikel untersucht diese paradoxe Verknüpfung linker Theorie und Essentialismus mit Blick auf die marxistischen Ideen, die Wolfs Faschismusdeutung beeinflusst haben, insbesondere die von der Frankfurter Schule geprägte Idee des instrumentellen Denkens und die Bachofensche Theorie vom

Mutterrecht. Eine Analyse dessen, wie Wolf Schuld auf der Geschlechtsebene gestaltet, wirft auf diese Weise die grundlegende Frage auf, wie Geschlecht auf einer symbolischen Ebene in linksorientierten Faschismustheorien funktioniert.

Claudia Koonz, author of the ground-breaking historical study *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (1987), commends Christa Wolf's *Kindheitsmuster* (1976) as one of the first works in any discipline, and in either Germany, 'which challenged canonical accounts of the Third Reich as a "man's world"'.ⁱ Implicating her female protagonists in the ideological and moral corruption of the Third Reich, Wolf subverted the model of history sanctioned by the *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (SED). Its interpretation of National Socialism rested on the Communist International's understanding of 'fascism' as an extreme form of capitalist imperialism. This focus on socio-economic structures overshadowed questions of individual responsibility. The few GDR histories of women in the Third Reich therefore centred not on their complicity but on the regime's misogynist policies.ⁱⁱ As this article will show, a focus on women and on questions of moral responsibility enables Wolf to critique and expand on the GDR's official model of history. Wolf's approach to the Nazi past is indebted to an understanding of the relationship between capitalism, fascism, and instrumental reason, a concept popularised by the Frankfurt School critics whose works remained largely unpublished in East Germany due to their condemnation of institutional Marxism.ⁱⁱⁱ This central tenet of Western Marxism provides Wolf with a framework within which to articulate individual moral responses to the social phenomenon 'fascism', on the one hand, and an antithetical ideal of human interaction, on the other. Since this ideal is embodied in female figures in *Kindheitsmuster*, however, Wolf tends to reiterate the symbolic notions of innocent and redemptive femininity through which cultural memory of National Socialism has traditionally been mediated.^{iv} That is to say, Wolf's attempt to write women into history does not entirely break free of an androcentric and ideological historical paradigm that mutes questions of guilt. Her association of women with essential values further conflicts with the official GDR view of gender politics on two levels. Firstly, it challenges the sex-blindness of historical materialism which has traditionally subsumed woman as category, meaning her character and her oppression, under the umbrella concern of class-conflict. Secondly, Wolf's treatment of femininity in *Kindheitsmuster* evokes essentialist notions of humanity that clash with historical materialism's emphasis on the historical, and therefore changeable, nature of man and his social relations. This article will consider these tensions in light of the Marxist texts that have shaped Wolf's interpretation of National Socialism, paying particular attention to the place of instrumental reason and patriarchy in her feminist and historical understanding. An examination of the ambivalent construction of gender and guilt in *Kindheitsmuster* raises important questions about how gender functions

symbolically in left-wing texts that came to shape post-war interpretations of National Socialism in both East and West Germany.

CHALLENGING NORMALISING NARRATIVES

Christa Wolf was one of several prominent authors in 1970s East Germany to consider what Heiner Müller termed ‘der gewöhnliche Faschismus’, fascism not as political phenomenon but as it was experienced by the many people ‘für die er das Normale war, wenn nicht die Norm’.^v Erich Honecker’s appointment as head of the SED and the easing of Cold War tensions had appeared to promise greater aesthetic and ideological freedom for GDR authors and historians previously concerned to toe the party line. The expulsion of the dissident poet and songwriter, Wolf Biermann, in 1976 thwarted this expectation and provoked a public response from writers like Wolf. This context explains in part the unprecedented controversy incited by *Kindheitsmuster* which was not widely available until 1977. Moreover, as Helen Bridge details, Wolf made herself a target by extensively and explicitly averring literature’s status as corrective to official narratives.^{vi} Wolf’s desire to challenge the state-sanctioned version of history is sounded in the incipit of *Kindheitsmuster*: ‘das Vergangene ist nicht tot. Es ist nicht einmal vergangen’.^{vii} Wolfgang Joho had previously cited this quotation from William Faulkner’s *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) in *Das Klassentreffen. Geschichte einer Reise* (1968) as a means to assert the continuity between the Third Reich and West German society.^{viii} Wolf believes that it is erroneous to purport in this way that fascism was effaced ‘nachdem man seine Machtzentren und Organisationsformen zerschlagen hatte’ (IV 415). Rather than depicting the history of National Socialism as finished, the narrative of *Kindheitsmuster* shifts associatively between the Third Reich and the global upheaval of the 1970s. It aesthetically realises the ‘historicisation’ upon which Wolf insists in a 1973 interview with Hans Kaufmann:

‘Historisieren’ heißt überraschenderweise hier einmal nicht: ‘verfremden’, sondern: diese historische Periode, weggeschoben und in ein Kampffeld anonymer gesellschaftlicher Kräfte verwandelt, wieder heranzurücken, die agierenden oder nicht agierenden Individuen – uns – noch einmal sichtbar zu machen und auf ihre Motive, ihre Verantwortlichkeit zu befragen (IV 423).

As Myra Love eloquently notes, ‘to historicize is, in this instance, to moralize, that is, to treat fascism as a product of human agency and to assign and to take responsibility for it’.^{ix} Wolf’s demand for historicisation alludes to Brecht’s programmatic statement that ‘verfremden heißt also historisieren, heißt Vorgänge und Personen als historisch, also als

vergänglich darzustellen'.^x His alienation effects aimed to make theatre audiences aware that protagonists' actions were the products of social relations that were in themselves historical and therefore changeable. Wolf's 'epic prose' is intended to enlighten her readership in the same manner. By reformulating Brecht's dictum, however, Wolf suggests that a dogmatic focus on the historical causes of social phenomena has obscured the motivations of the individual. Shifting focus from impersonal social structures to the brutal normality of everyday life in the Third Reich, to the political choices and moral failings of the individual, Wolf aims to bring the past back to emotional life and thus reiterate its relevance to the present. Wolf's moral focus therefore challenges the normalising thrust of GDR memory politics which sought to jettison the negative legacy of fascism and project it onto its capitalist neighbours, denying any political and subjective continuity between the Third Reich and the present in the GDR. In historical contexts normalisation broadly refers to the processes whereby seminal historical periods or events cease to tax a given society's historical consciousness and to drive its political agenda. Gavriel Rosenfeld believes that the 'abnormality' of a given historical era is defined by the moral reaction that it provokes; the muting of its moral dimensions is therefore 'a crucial component of the larger process of normalisation'.^{xi} Conceptualising fascism in politico-economic terms, the GDR neutralised the moral dimensions of the National Socialist past. Even the singularity of the Holocaust was downplayed in its hermeneutic model of class-conflict.^{xii} As a result the SED's politics were defined *against* the supposed fascism of the West, and not *in reaction* to its own Nazi past.

Christa Wolf advocates the practice of 'moral memory' in order to counteract the normalising tendencies of East German memory politics in which 'the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as a moral and political internal debate was glaringly absent'.^{xiii} Moral memory illuminates individual memories suppressed in the name of self-preservation as well as those aspects of history that conflict with homogenising official narratives. The narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* proposes moral memory as a much-needed complement to dominant, scientific definitions of memory: 'man unterscheidet folgende Gedächtnisarten: mechanisches, Gestalt- und logisches, verbales, materiales, Handlungsgedächtnis. Heftig vermisst wird die Gattung: moralisches Gedächtnis' (V 60). Contrasting mechanical and rational forms of cognition with moral memory, the narrator suggests that the attitudes encouraged in technological societies hinder non-rational, critically-reflective, and, ultimately, moral forms of thought and interaction. This applies equally to Wolf's critique of the GDR present in *Kindheitsmuster* as to her interpretation of National Socialism. Wolf juxtaposes 'Verführung zur Selbstaufgabe', referring to the Nazi past, and 'Gedächtnisverlust', alluding to the GDR present, in the rubric for the tenth chapter of *Kindheitsmuster*. The choice of the word 'seduction' to describe widespread conformity in the Third Reich addresses the question, 'generally avoided by GDR historians, of why National Socialist ideology found the support of the masses'.^{xiv} It connects the two phenomena and eras through a sense of false-consciousness and powerlessness in the face of social structures. Wolf here suggests that the opposite of moral memory, the (self-

)repression encouraged by the GDR, may result in the sort of apathy and pathological conformity that characterised members of the Third Reich.

This becomes particularly clear when *Kindheitsmuster* is read against Wolf's influential essay 'Lesen und Schreiben' (1968) in which she first theorised the relationship between memory, historical consciousness, and moral sensibility. Wolf argues that literature must keep alive the non-rational values that science and politics neglect if it is to match their contribution to social progress. She believes that literature is uniquely positioned to promote values like sensibility because it is a repository of cultural and moral values. Wolf consequently reminds us not to underestimate literature's contribution to the 'Zug der Menschheit aus dem Dickicht in die ersehnte Ordnung – nennen wir sie, mit einem altväterlichen Wort, "Gesittung"' (IV 250). This unusual term for ethos points to the influence on Wolf's ethical position of J.J. Bachofen's anthropological study *Das Mutterrecht* (1861) and its reception primarily by August Bebel in the ninth edition of *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (1891) and Friedrich Engels in *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats* (1884). Channelled through the Marxist canon, Bachofen's theory of matriarchy found resonance in 1960s and 1970s feminism and in the anti-fascist writings of Wilhelm Reich, Ernst Fromm, Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, and Max Horkheimer. Peter Davies describes the term 'Gesittung' as a 'favoured word of Bachofen's, indicating a unified world-view based on the correspondence of religious and legal principles'.^{xv} For Bachofen, this stage of the civilization process was reached when gynocratic societies were founded. Wolf's moral idealism and construction of femininity in *Kindheitsmuster* cannot be dissociated from the place of matriarchy in her Marxist historical understanding.

In 'Lesen und Schreiben' National Socialism appears as the antithesis of a desired matriarchal ethos. The Third Reich illustrates to Wolf the possible consequences of a world in which individuals remain a moral 'tabula rasa'. She diagnoses apathy as a consequence of its ideological and chauvinist literature which failed to provide moral and intellectual orientation. Lacking the 'nüchterne Blick des Erzählers', its literature presented a one-sided, ideological view of society. It was not defined by the social breadth and depth of historical consciousness that Wolf believes is vital to the 'Anstrengungen des Menschen, über sich selbst hinauszuwachsen oder, vielleicht: sich zu erreichen' (IV 243). This ideal is encapsulated by the concept of moral memory which builds on the interrelated ethics of remembering, writing, and interacting explored by Wolf in *Nachdenken über Christa T.* (1968). The connection that Wolf draws between an impoverished memory and the conformist renunciation of the self brings to mind the political writings of György Lukács, whose influence on literary theory in the GDR was unmatched, even though he was cast as a revisionist after his participation of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956.^{xvi} In his early work *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* (1923) Lukács linked a lack of historical consciousness to the subordination of the worker to the capitalist system. He adapted Marx's concepts of commodity-fetishism and alienation with reference to Max Weber's theory of rationalisation, arguing that under capitalism social relationships assume the character of

calculable and controllable relations between objects. This produces reified consciousness in the individual producer who consequently thinks in mechanical, deductive terms and can only perceive the process of production as fragmented and unchangeable. Historical progress is only possible once the proletariat overcomes this false-consciousness by becoming aware of its own reification and hence recognising the totality and historical nature of social relations. After *Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein* was condemned at the fifth World Congress of the Comintern in 1924, Lukács increasingly distanced himself from central tenets of his study. He refused to allow its reprinting until 1967, adding a preface criticising his previous ‘überwiegenden Subjektivismus’ which had led him to emphasise subjective consciousness over class consciousness and downplay the significance of labour as the interagent between nature and society.^{xvii} The influence of this founding text of Western Marxism, and theorists like Ernst Bloch, Theodor Adorno, and Max Horkheimer, on Wolf’s historical understanding signals her dissatisfaction with institutional Marxism and her search for ways to turn the critical tools of Marxism against real existing socialism.^{xviii}

Picking up where Wolf left off in *Nachdenken über Christa T.*, the opening pages of *Kindheitsmuster* establish Wolf’s preoccupation with the reification of the individual in contemporary society. The narrator notes that by consigning the past to oblivion ‘wir stellen es von uns ab und stellen uns fremd’ (V 13). Since her present and past selves are separated by a gulf of personal and political experiences, the narrator struggles to assume the subject position, addressing her contemporary self in the second person and her childhood self with the impersonal noun ‘das Kind’ or ‘Nelly’. The roots of this self-estrangement are situated in the Nazi childhood of the narrator who is trained in conformity at home, school and in the League of German Girls (BDM). Wolf traces the development in Nelly of a category of thought ‘das zwar nicht im Dritten Reich angefangen hat, damals aber seine bisher destruktivste Ausprägung hatte [...] [das] instrumentale Denken’ (VIII 358). Instrumental reason prioritises means over ends, and reduces human beings to objects of manipulation. The term was popularised by the post-war writings of the Frankfurt School who radicalised Lukács’ theory of reification: instrumental reason is so pervasive that revolutionary faith can no longer be placed in the (proletarian) social consciousness. Critics have generally taken for granted the importance of Western Marxist concepts such as reification and instrumental reason to Wolf’s conceptualisation of the socio-psychological continuities between the past and the present in *Kindheitsmuster*. Indeed, *Kindheitsmuster* tends to be passed over in studies of Wolf’s developing critique of instrumental reason.^{xix} Significantly, however, the centrality of the individual in these concepts allows Wolf to expand on the macro-historical and economic interpretations of fascism current in the GDR whilst continuing to work within a Western Marxist framework, albeit one at odds with institutional Marxism.

Kindheitsmuster depicts the genesis of an instrumental attitude in Nelly. The narrator describes as formative ‘die Erfahrung, daß man sich beliebt machen muß, um geliebt zu werden’ (V 230). Nelly has learned to know love as a social bargaining chip. Her

actions increasingly comprise a balancing act between love towards her family and devotion to the nation. Indeed, the narrator summarises the appeal of National Socialism to her younger self with the word 'compensation' (V 286). The opportunities for liberation provided by the BDM are remuneration for Nelly's subordination to *Reich* and *Führer* and present an appealing alternative to the restrictive family environment. Here Wolf indicates the degradation of love to an 'exchange-value', a locution that she uses to describe a fundamental flaw in interpersonal relations in 'Berührung', her 1977 preface to Maxie Wander's *Guten Morgen, du Schöne* (1975) (VIII 123). The term derives from Marxian economics and refers to the quantifiable value of an object as commodity independent from its 'use-value', its qualitative value in relation to human needs. Wolf's use of this nomenclature allows her to insinuate that both social and production relations are deformed under capitalism.

Due to her age Nelly's conformism has limited consequences. By portraying characters in the public sphere Wolf can indicate the more sinister social consequences of the self-interest incipient in Nelly. The depiction of protagonists in the world of work makes explicit the association Wolf draws between capitalist society, instrumental reason, and National Socialism. Given the traditional division of labour in the 1930s, Wolf primarily depicts the consequences of instrumental reason through the male protagonists. As owner of a business, Nelly's father, Bruno, becomes actively complicit in the state's politics. In order to continue trading he must comply with the Nazi system of prejudice, especially once he has been reprimanded for ignoring the political allegiance of his customers and contributing to a socialist organisation. With a second shop near the barracks, the Jordans literally profit from the war – despite their political apathy. Similarly, Nelly's favourite uncle, Walter Menzel, becomes involved in and benefits from the war because he holds a management position in a munitions firm. Wolf portrays in literary form what Adorno noted in his influential lecture 'Erziehung nach Auschwitz', namely that 'was man so "Mitläufertum" nennt, war primär Geschäftsinteresse'.^{xx} Her other uncles are ambitious and bigoted, actively asserting their conformity with Nazi politics through their business dealings. The narrator frames her memory of them with knowledge gleaned from the biographies of high-ranking Nazis. She is struck by a description of Eichmann and Höß as 'überaus fleißige deutsche Männer, von ihrer Arbeit besessen' (V 379). She applies this knowledge to Emil Dunst who not only buys a factory at a rock-bottom price from a fleeing Jewish family but, the narrator concludes, he of all her acquaintances 'paßte an jeden Platz der Vernichtungsmaschinerie' (V 353). He manifests the 'gefühlssfernes, "sachliches" Denken und Verhalten' that is, in Wolf's opinion, characteristic of members of industrial society (VIII 229). *Kindheitsmuster* identifies conformity and a lack of compassion as consequences of the instrumental and objectifying attitudes bred by capitalism. Encouraging mental torpor, instrumental reason is further a barrier to moral action as Wolf defines it in historical materialist terms, as everything that prevents the individual 'von Objekt zum Subjekt der Geschichte zu werden' (IV 436). Yet, where Wolf begins to explore bigotry and cruelty, comparing the Commandant of Auschwitz with her callous uncles, this

historical materialism is increasingly overshadowed by Wolf's appeals to an *a priori* ideal of 'das eigentlich Menschliche', a phrase that is repeatedly invoked in her essays.

In a discussion with Hans Kaufmann in 1973 Wolf acknowledges that this sort of moral faith is controversial in a Marxist-Leninist context which emphasises the scientific basis of Marxism and rejects any appeal to abstract moral principles as utopian (IV 433-7).^{xxi} Wolf's apparently abstract moral idealism was a common cause for concern in reviews of *Kindheitsmuster* in East Germany, even amongst those critics who accepted the importance of her new perspective on the Third Reich.^{xxii} Wolf's critics charged her with presenting morality as a constant measure of society rather than as an expression of class-based, and therefore inherently changeable, value systems. In her polemic review, which triggered a debate about *Kindheitsmuster* in the pages of *Sinn und Form*, Annemarie Auer criticises Wolf's individualist and 'historically inaccurate' representation of the Third Reich. For Auer, 'die Ausforschungen der *Kindheitsmuster* verlieren den Boden unter den Füßen; sie bewegen sich auf einer Rückzugslinie, indem sie die sozial-historischen Kriterien durch aus der Luft gegriffene Moralkriterien ersetzen'. She does not deny that moral questions are of importance to any discussion of the Third Reich but lambasts Wolf for failing to consider 'die oberste Moral der Klasse, Brüderlichkeit und Solidarität'.^{xxiii} In 'Berührung' (1977), published the year after *Kindheitsmuster*, Wolf implicitly validates her moral understanding by insisting upon its roots in Marx's historical materialism. Her opening claim that 'Menschlichkeit heißt niemals, unter keinen Umständen einen anderen zum Mittel für eigene Zwecke zu machen' clearly references Kant's categorical imperative (VIII 116). Wolf expands on this remark not by engaging with idealist ethics, however, but by embedding her ideal of moral behaviour in a critique of capitalist society and alienation. She cites as a 'Voraussetzung für nichtentfremdete Existenz' a reflection on 'Money' from Marx's *Ökonomisch-philosophische Manuskripte* (1844), discovered in 1933: 'Setze den Menschen als Menschen und sein Verhältnis zur Welt als ein menschliches voraus, so kannst du Liebe nur gegen Liebe austauschen' (VIII 122).^{xxiv} In so doing Wolf anchors her moral perspective in aspects of Marx's language that imply normative values.

Like her Western Marxist peers, Wolf uses the early Marx to emphasise the humanist roots of socialism that she sees neglected in the GDR's focus on productivity and the 'scientific-technological revolution'. This was a primary aspect of the economic reform and growth plans in 1960s communist countries which conceived technology as a means to propel social progress in class-free societies. Since the 1960s a number of prominent GDR writers including Heiner Müller, Günter Kunert, and Intraud Morgner had begun to question East Germany's supposed departure from the excessive rationalisation that defined social organisation in capitalist countries. Their critique of a technocracy that had diverted the Enlightenment from its humanist goals aligned them with their Marxist colleagues in the West, notably the members of the Frankfurt School.^{xxv} Wolf's concerns about the contemporary focus on technology and efficiency are staged in the conversations between the narrator and her brother, Lutz, in the narrative present of *Kindheitsmuster*. The reintroduction of humanist categories into the critical vocabulary of socialism enables Wolf

to challenge the premises of the GDR narrative of progress. In *Kindheitsmuster* Wolf suggests that, by risking the effacement of the individual, this narrative of progress succumbs to the same instrumentalising drives as National Socialism. It may therefore fall victim to the same moral atrophy. To this extent, Wolf uses moral criteria, grounded in the Western Marxist notion of instrumental reason, to draw connections between the past and the present that are obscured by the GDR's prescriptive normalising approach to the Third Reich.

GENDER IDEALS AND NORMATIVE MORALITY

The gendering of Wolf's moral register distinguishes her critique of technology and Enlightenment rationality; it constitutes 'the very radicalism of Wolf's work, not as an alternative to Marxism but as a qualitatively new and autonomous dimension that is a prerequisite for its renewal'.^{xxvi} Given the centrality of instrumental reason to Wolf's interpretation of Nazism, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to *Kindheitsmuster* as an important stage in the evolution of Wolf's feminist perspective. It is important to note, however, that the inverse relationship that Wolf perceives between instrumental reason and 'das eigentlich Menschliche' clearly emerges in her configuration of gender and guilt in *Kindheitsmuster*. Historically, Wolf argues elsewhere, women's isolation from the capitalist public sphere has meant that they have been 'weniger eingeübt in die Techniken der Anpassung und der Abtötung ihrer Gefühle als viele schärfer gedrosselte Männer' (VIII 432). This conviction manifests itself in *Kindheitsmuster* through the women in the narrator's family. In comparison to their working husbands, they manage to perform empathetic acts of semi-resistance within the limits of their domestic existence. Liesbeth consults a Jewish doctor until she is legally forbidden from doing so and shows him enough loyalty that he sends her care packages after the war. Charlotte, Emmy and their mother risk providing a Ukrainian slave labourer with swaddling bands for a friend who has given birth. These acts are wholly ethical in a Kantian sense: they are performed out of a sense of duty and in spite of the possible consequences. They evince 'das eigentlich Menschliche' that Wolf believes is normally corroded by instrumental reason. In *Kindheitsmuster*, as in numerous literary treatments of National Socialism in the first post-war decades, women are conceived as beacons of moral hope.^{xxvii} Thus, at the same time as Wolf's moral perspective on National Socialism challenges GDR attempts to normalise the past, it also causes her to fall back on the idealised gender stereotypes through which the most profound ethical problems posed by National Socialism have at times been neutralised.^{xxviii}

As a threshold figure, Charlotte illuminates well Wolf's investment in moral ideals gendered as feminine. Whilst she, unlike her sisters, transgresses the boundary of the domestic to enter the world of work, the second shop that she runs shares its premises with the family home. Whereas Bruno is brought into line with Nazi expectations through the

business, the two acts of rebellion that bring Charlotte to the attention of the authorities actually occur within the shop: she is reprimanded for ignoring the state business hours and for casting doubt on the outcome of the war in front of her customers. Charlotte has not internalised the rules of conformity and self-interest that define her husband's actions. The narrator cannot, however, deny her mother's failings. Charlotte's regime of obedience, conformity and 'normality' undoubtedly prepares Nelly for seduction by National Socialism.^{xxix}

Most unfathomable to the narrator is her mother's decision to stay behind to guard the home and business when the rest of her family, including her children, fled from the Red Army in 1945. The narrator senses the need to begin her account with this moment. Yet she can only begin to understand by writing around the scene of abandonment, by establishing Charlotte's essential goodness before daring, four-hundred pages later, to transgress the family taboo imposed upon her mother's aberration. Her narrative aim is unsettled by a filial desire to protect her mother and a perceived social taboo against criticising parental, and particularly maternal, figures. Charlotte's behaviour has assumed symbolic proportions for the narrator who muses that her mother's drastic decision deserved more wonderment than 'die Tatsache, daß die Bevölkerung über Drahtfunk aufgefordert wurde, ihre Stadt zu räumen' (V 412). The narrator simply cannot reconcile Charlotte's actions with the necessity that drove the population of the Eastern Territories to flee. I therefore dispute Michelle Mattson's claim that 'Wolf never comes anywhere near portraying the "mother" as the locus of special ideological significance'.^{xxx} Charlotte is so significant precisely because ideology was able to corrupt what Wolf views as the foundational social relationship, that between mother and child. This becomes clear when the narrator imagines Charlotte's motivations for staying behind: 'Hüter von Haus und Herd sein, dem Mann für Hab und Gut verantwortlich sein, den Kindern ihr Erbe erhalten' (V 416). The narrator conceptualizes the Nazi family as a capitalist microcosm in which motherhood is reduced to an economic function and reification is total: ownership overrides personal relationships. In the narrator's mind, this false prioritisation is inseparable from the vehemence with which National Socialist ideology was able to take hold in the imagination of the population.

Similarly, when the narrator remembers her excitement about the *Anschluß* she notes that 'Charlotte Jordan, durch den verfluchten Laden daran gehindert, sich in gehöriger Weise ihren Kindern zu widmen' threatened to, but ultimately did not, destroy the radio (V 242). Nelly's growing fanaticism is attributed to her mother's failure to act due to her involvement in the business. Wolf's apparently essentialist critique of the working mother conflicts with the socialist belief that she expresses elsewhere that women need employment in order to achieve financial parity and therefore social equality. This ambivalence typifies the tension between moral essentialism and historical materialism that pervades the novel. It also suggests Wolf's dissatisfaction with the reality of GDR society. In 'Berührung' and the short-story 'Dienstag, der 27. September' (1960) Wolf eloquently describes the 'double burden' of work and domestic life that afflicted women in the GDR.

She is disturbed by the sacrifices that women consider necessary in order to get ahead in the world of work, marvelling at 'wie weitgehend die Ermutigung, an öffentlichen Angelegenheiten teilzunehmen, das private Leben und Fühlen vieler Frauen verändert hat' (VIII 119). The 'equality' offered by adaptation to the homogenous rationalism of the public sphere represents progress neither for women nor for society. This is a belief that permeated twentieth-century critiques of rationalism and authoritarianism. In his contribution to the *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (1936), written from exile in America in response to the emergent fascism in Germany, Max Horkheimer paradigmatically argued:

Wenn somit die gegenwärtige Familie auf Grund der durch die Frau bestimmten menschlichen Beziehungen ein Reservoir von Widerstandskräften gegen die völlige Entseelung der Welt ausmacht und ein antiautoritäres Moment in sich enthält, hat freilich die Frau infolge ihrer Abhängigkeit ihr eigenes Wesen verändert.^{xxxi}

For Wolf, however, women continue to embody a mode of resistance to the reifying mechanisms of the world of work. In a 1976 interview with Adam Krzemiński she insisted that women have 'bis heute eine größere Empfindsamkeit behalten und – schämen wir uns dessen nicht – größere Spontaneität und eine andere, menschlichere Wertskala' (VIII 74). These statements juxtapose a view of gender roles as socially-determined and a sense of women's intrinsic association with certain values and emotions. They exemplify the inherent ambivalence of Wolf's feminism. In the narrator's imagination, even though the capitalist imperative to protect material goods determined Charlotte's decision to stay behind in Landsberg an der Warthe, moments later Charlotte would have realised, 'aber das ist ja Wahnsinn!' (V 416). The narrator cannot bring herself to believe that knowledge of another ethos had been entirely repressed. This alternative ethos is linked to Charlotte's sense of foreboding and capacity for social insight.

Even as a child the narrator was aware that her mother and National Socialism represented 'zwei einander ausschließenden Arten von Moral' (V 280). This comparison is made explicit when the narrator recalls reading about the Nazi *Lebensborn* welfare and maternity homes for 'racially valuable' expectant mothers. Drilled in her duty to the nation as a future mother of German soldiers, Nelly felt 'eingeklemmt zwischen der Mahnung der Mutter, sich nicht "wegzuwerfen", und der Weisung des "Schwarzen Korps" zur unbedingten Hingabe für den Führer' (V 327). With distaste she remembers reading about 'racially pure' men and women being brought together 'zum Zwecke der Zeugung eines reinrassigen Kindes' and how the resulting child 'von einer Mutter dem Führer zum Geschenk gemacht wurde' (V 327).^{xxxii} Despite her otherwise unwavering dedication to Hitler, the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* remembers that she 'deutlich dachte: Das nicht'

upon reading the article (V 327). She has a similar reaction to a novel set during the Thirty Years War about a girl who sleeps with members of an enemy army in order to infect them with the plague. This novel is the subject of initial deliberation in 'Lesen und Schreiben' when Wolf herself remembers thinking as a child, 'eine Heldin, so sollte man sein. Ich las das und dachte: Das nicht' (IV 252). Since she does not believe that moral instincts are innate she asks 'woher eigentlich dieses Zurückzucken bei einigen wenigen, scharf in die Erinnerung eingeritzten Gelegenheiten, die ich heute für entscheidend halte?' (IV 252)? Wolf understands this moral conscience as a product of experience and history:

Jedes Individuum muß neu erlernen, was die Gesellschaft in Jahrtausenden als höchste, mühsamste, am meisten gefährdete Leistung hervorgebracht hat [...] Wir haben uns eine Erinnerung bewahrt an Vor-Zeiten, die eine einfache und heitere Weise der Existenz gewährten; diese Erinnerung prägt unser Sehnsuchtsbild von der Zukunft (IV 280).

This 'einfache und heitere Weise der Existenz' becomes more tangible in the Cassandra project. Wolf refers to Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* and Engel's *Ursprung der Familie* in her 1983 Frankfurt poetics lectures. They serve as validation for her arguments about the potential to surmount the dominion of capitalism, patriarchy, and instrumental reason. Under its Marxist inflection, matriarchy came to represent a pre-patriarchal and pre-capitalist form of society that symbolised equality, peace, and communism.^{xxxiii} In Wolf's writing, as in feminist literature and Marxist social critique more broadly, the value judgements associated with these categories tend to be codified along gender lines. Femininity becomes associated with the archaic, with conciliation, and love. The influence of this feminised social ideal on *Kindheitsmuster* is implied by the nickname, 'Kassandra', that the narrator gives to her mother. She remembers Charlotte, as Cassandra, 'aufblickend manchmal, mit diesem Blick, den ihr Mann nicht sehen will' (V 242). Just as Cassandra foretold the fall of Troy and was ignored, Charlotte repeatedly expresses concern about the Nazi government. Reflecting on their relationship, the narrator realises that her own scepticism regarding social reality, and her daughter's rebellious nature, are symptoms of the pessimistic tendency that they have inherited from Charlotte. By privileging women as sources of insight, Wolf modulates orthodox Marxist theory according to which the proletariat is the agent of historical insight and therefore change. The nickname 'Kassandra' that the narrator gives to her mother indicates the extent to which Wolf equates Charlotte's capacity for moral action with her consciousness of history, in particular a matriarchal prehistory. In the process of her memory work the narrator of *Kindheitsmuster* reflects on her past and re-assesses her relationship with Charlotte. Accepting their similarities and the formative influence of the past, the narrator becomes aware of her place in a historical

continuum linking the GDR present with the Third Reich, and the 1930s with matriarchal antiquity.

This is one permutation of what Joan Wallach Scott terms the fantasy of feminist history, a sequential account of women's quest for emancipation that effaces any sense of 'discontinuity, conflict, and difference that might undermine the politically desired stability of the categories termed "woman" and "feminist"'.^{xxxiv} The achievements of contemporary feminism were arguably predicated on such strategies for articulating a political identity. Indeed, Peter Davies writes that this is an inevitable consequence of politicised engagements with matriarchal theories since they 'always require such a fundamentally untheorised, invisible point of origin', a place of stability from which to project an often utopian alternative to the present.^{xxxv} In Wolf's socialist ethics matriarchy embodies a set of moral essences neglected in the present. In fact, as a cipher of historical continuity in *Kindheitsmuster*, matriarchy symbolically attests the universality of these values. This notion of constancy is, however, inconsistent with a Marxist understanding of historical progress, an objection that has also been raised in relation to the debatable normative elements of Marx's early writings. At times these seemed to posit a notion of human essence or 'species being' that conflicts with his stress on the historically-specific and therefore changeable nature of human behaviour. This particularly appears to be the case where Marx discusses gender. Susan Himmelweit writes that whilst for Marx and Engels the capitalist workplace is subject to constant change, 'the production that is carried out in the home appears, because of its isolation from society, as timeless and unchanging as the human reproduction it accompanies'.^{xxxvi} This ambivalence reappears in the writings of the Frankfurt School, notably the *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947), which became one of the most influential diagnoses of fascism in West Germany, providing the theoretical underpinning for the New Left and the student movement. Adorno and Horkheimer offered an account of the Enlightenment project of human emancipation which, in its drive to control nature, increasingly warped into its opposite, the desire to dominate, enslave, and oppress. Associated with a dominated and repudiated nature, women become ciphers of victimhood and innocence through passivity in *Dialektik der Aufklärung*. In the fragment 'Mensch und Tier' Adorno and Horkheimer explain the oppression of women with regards to their status as reminders of a nature in mankind that patriarchal society has disavowed in its efforts to dominate the natural world. Hence the training of woman in self-renunciation in order to mask her nature. The spiteful woman, it follows, avenges the oppression of her sex:

Die unterdrückte Frau als Megäre hat die Epoche überlebt und zeigt die Fratze der verstümmelten Natur noch in einer Zeit, in der die Herrschaft schon den trainierten Körper beider Geschlechter modelliert, in dessen Uniformität die Fratze unterging. Auf dem Hintergrunde solcher Massenproduktion wird das Schelten der Megäre,

die wenigstens ihr eigenes unterschiedenes Gesicht behielt, zum Zeichen der Humanität, die Häßlichkeit zur Spur des Geistes.^{xxxvii}

This leads to the puzzling conclusion that even modern woman's feverish participation in male society, not least in its pogroms, is a sign of her 'ohnmächtiger Wut'.^{xxxviii} The deliberations of Adorno and Horkheimer on this subject are indicative of a way of thinking that sees women, even in their complicity, as victims of an ideology that has distorted their essential nature. In their description and deconstruction of the patriarchal logic of the western tradition, Adorno and Horkheimer repeat, if inadvertently, the non-recognition of women as subjects in the western philosophical tradition. As Robyn Marsco astutely observes, 'unlike concrete women forced to submit to the totality of capitalism and bureaucratic authority' the abstract feminine ideal that permeates the anti-fascist writings of the Frankfurt School evokes a sense of the normative reality from which post-Enlightenment society so destructively departs.^{xxxix} My analysis of *Kindheitsmuster* suggests how deeply such philosophical appropriations of femininity as normative ideal have permeated cultural and historical discourse. The prominence accorded to the issue of women's relationship to the Third Reich in *Kindheitsmuster* sheds invaluable light on the processes through which gender ideals become implicated in memory discourses. Revisiting landmark literary works such as *Kindheitsmuster* can therefore sharpen our critical appreciation of literature's interaction with memory discourses as well as its influence by and on the cultural and historical frameworks through which the individual comes to understand their gendered position in relation to history.